## Appendix IV.

[Vide item " V. Communication to the Council " on page 171, supra.]

# GOVERNMENT OF MADRAS

# PUBLIC DEPARTMENT

## PRESS COMMUNIQUÉ.

*Fort St. George, the* 31*st August* 1928.

The Government have observed suggestions in the Press and have received representations to the effect that they might with advantage have intervened in the disputes between the South Indian Railway workmen and the company and might even now intervene to compose the differences that exist. There has also been some misunderstanding of the actions and attitude of the magistracy and the police during the strike. The Government therefore deem it advisable, now that the general strike is over and the situation has become more settled, to publish a brief statement of the facts of the strike and the attitude of the Government in relation thereto.

2. The cause of the dispute between the workshop workers and the Railway Administration was the reorganization of the shops necessitating a considerable reduction in the number of hands employed. As the Railway Administration was unable to undertake to find employment for all the men and as the men refused to agree to the methods of selection proposed by the management, matters came to a deadlock and with effect from the 29th June the workshops at Golden Rock, Negapatam, Podanur and Trichinopoly were closed (with the exception of a part of the shops at Golden Rock) by the Administration. The deadlock continued till, on 18th July 1928, the President of the Central Committee of the Labour Union, Trichinopoly, suggested to the Agent arbitration by the Labour Commissioner on the four points—

(1) Payment of lock-out wages.
(2) Absorption of surplus men after voluntary resignation.
(3) Increase of menials' wages.
(4) Redressing of running men's grievances.

The Agent replied accepting the principle of arbitration in regard to the matter of menials' wages and the running staff's grievances provided that the general strike were called off. He pointed out that there could be no change in the policy of reduction settled with the approval of the Government of India. The reply to this was that, as arbitration had not been accepted on all four points, the

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President could not place the matter before his committee, and in the result a general strike was declared on the railway with effect from the night of the 19th—20th July in sympathy with the workshop hands.

3. The police measures taken before the strike occurred were directed mainly towards safeguarding railway premises at the chief stations, and to holding men in reserve to meet possible developments. The main centres where trouble was most likely were thought to be Trichinopoly and Negapatam and forces of reserve police were stationed at these places. In addition, the railway police were strongly reinforced in order to protect the more important places, such as the watering and engine-changing stations. It was not anticipated that serious acts of violence would occur as they did all over the metre gauge system. When it became apparent that acts of violence might be anticipated at any point, police guards were provided on such trains as continued to run and on the pilot engines. In addition to these measures, police patrols were established along the line and the headmen of the villages traversed by the railway were directed to patrol the line within their village limits. These measures were effective as acts of violence practically ceased after the first four days of the strike, although a few sporadic attempts to damage the line occurred : so recently as 10th August, an attempt at derailment was frustrated and a man was arrested and charged for tampering with the permanent way near Pattaivayathalai station. The train service which had since the beginning of the strike been restricted to six trains running by day light was gradually increased from the 25th onward and night running was re-established from the 27th July.

4. From the outset of the strike numerous acts of sabotage and mob violence took place. The local magistracy found it necessary in several places to have recourse to the power vested in them by the law, to forbid by means of orders under section 144, Criminal Procedure Code, public meetings thought likely to lead to breaches of the peace. Such orders were passed in Madras City, Chingleput, Salem, certain parts of the Trichinopoly district, Negapatam, Mayavaram, Panruti, Villupuram, Cuddalore, Nellikuppam and Erode. In all cases, except Trichinopoly where they have been retained in force for the present, the orders were withdrawn by the magistracy as soon as the necessity for them appeared to have passed. A considerable number of prosecutions have already ended in the conviction of the accused for rioting and for offences under the Railways Act. Other cases are still under trial including charges against the leaders of the Labour Union and this being so the Government do not propose to refer to offences alleged in these cases.

5. The magistracy and police thus took no action beyond that dictated by their responsibilities for the preservation of the public peace.

6. As regards possible intervention by the Government in the dispute, it will be seen that at the outset when the Agent was willing to accept arbitration on certain matters (affecting the menials and running staff) the union officials were not prepared to accept the offer. Later the Agent, on the ground that those who professed to represent the Labour Union were unable to influence the men, withdrew his recognition of the union. At the present time the position has further materially altered. The menials and running staff have gone back to work and the Government understand that the Agent has invited deputations to meet him to discuss any misunderstandings still existing. The Government trust that as the result of these negotiations an amicable settlement will be arrived at. As regards the workshop hands whose objection to the reductions in the shops led up to the strike, they have now all resigned and are drawing their bonuses and other dues under the terms of the Agent's original offer. Any workman is at liberty to offer himself for re-engagement on the terms advertised by the Agent. There is thus at present no question left on which to arbitrate in this matter.

7. The Government have thus been ready to offer their mediation wherever such mediation was practicable and acceptable to the parties concerned, but their chief duty has been and will continue to be to enforce the law against violence, and other illegal acts, to ensure as far as possible the safety of the travelling public, to prevent the disturbance of the public tranquillity and to bring to punishment those guilty of offences. They have no intention of condoning offences or of ordering a general withdrawal of cases from trial by the courts of law.

H. G. STOKES,
*Acting Chief Secretary.*

TRUTH ALONE TRIUMPHS